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Department for GTIP Janet Zinn and EAP/MLS Demian Smith

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SUBJECT: GTIP Grant Monitoring: Asian Research Center for Migration

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Ref: State 112289 (G/TIP FY 08 Monitoring Request)

1. (SBU) Summary: The Asian Research Center for Migration (AR CM) is proceeding with the study of labor brokerage firms that send Thai citizens to work abroad. While its research plan has altered significantly, including travel to alternate destinations with an increased number of staff, project leader Dr. Supang Chantavanich is confident that project will be completed within budget and the same approximate time frame. Given the importance of labor brokers to the human trafficking dynamic in Thailand (and Southeast Asia), the final report should be directly relevant to the efforts of both government and civil society to combat labor trafficking. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Comment: While much of ARCM's research plan has changed, the rationale behind these changes appears sound. ARCM, under Dr. Supang's leadership, has conducted multiple, similar studies in the past. Its proven capacity for quality research and the strong qualifications of Dr. Supang give us high confidence that the project goals will be met. ARCM should be a candidate for additional project funding beyond this six-month study. End Comment.

3. (U) In response to reftel request, Econoff met November 17 with Dr. Supang Chantavanich of the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) to discuss progress on its USD 85,000 project involving the study of the practices or Thai recruitment agencies that send Thai workers abroad. Although reftel requested an on-site review six months after the project start date, given the six-month time-frame of the project in question and ARCM's status as a first-time recipient of State Department funds, Post determined to conduct a review approximately two months after the start date. In the meeting, Dr. Supang was joined by ARCM financial officer Ms. Dolladee Taiwetchasatr.

General Activities

4. (U) Supang confirmed ARCM began project activities even before receipt of all project funds from the Thai Government's (RTG) International Development Cooperation Agency (TICA) in September 2009 (Note: Through an agreement with the Embassy, TICA advances funds to all State Department grant recipients and collects receipts from them while conducting auditing services, which provide additional oversight on project funding. End Note.) Supang has met with current and former employees of the RTG Ministry of Labor's Office of Foreign Workers Administration. A research team made a scheduled visit to Udon Thani province for meetings with five labor recruiting firms based there, and is scheduled to make similar trips over the coming weeks. Supang explained that ARCM has selected firms to interview (from the approximately 250 registered firms relevant to its research) based on a number of factors, including

the extent of their existing operations.

15. (U) Supang explained that, based on the visit to Udon Thani, provincial field visits will not require as much time as originally planned and second trips to certain locations will not be required. At the same time, field interviews (both audio recorded and not) require transcription, thereby making data collection more labor intensive than anticipated. As such, ARCM has altered its domestic data collection plan. Instead of two trips to Chiang Rai, ARCM will make one trip there and another to Lamphun province (just south of Chiang Mai). Instead of traveling to Nakhon Ratchasima (also known as Korat) in eastern Thailand, researchers will travel to Khon Kaen province in the northeast). ARCM also scaled up its project-related personnel, from two to three researchers (all ARCM staff) and three to six research assistants (two of the assistants are undergraduate students, two are graduate students, and two are prior graduate students).

16. (U) ARCM has also determined that its planned visit to a destination country for Thai laborers will be to either Qatar or Bahrain, but not South Korea as originally planned. Supang explained that, since beginning research, she has determined that there are few Thai broker firms with operations in South Korea. Most of the Thai workers who travel there do so through government to government programs that do not require an intermediary (Thai workers learn Korean while in Thailand prior to traveling to work in sectors such as construction). Whether in Qatar or Bahrain, ARCM plans to conduct interviews with the Thai Embassy Labor attache, overseas representatives of recruitment companies, and Thai workers. Supang assured that despite the changes to its data collection plan (including to the size of the research staff), ARCM will be able to conduct all activities within the allotted budget. (Note: Post is seeking an updated budget from ARCM to reflect changes detailed in paragraphs five and six. End Note).

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Challenges, Kudos, and Recommendations

17. (SBU) Challenges: Supang explained that the need to send formal letters to companies in order to seek interviews with management and staff requires is somewhat burdensome, although most responses to her requests have been positive and that ARCM is on-track with its provincial visit schedule. She noted that while she would prefer to audio record interviews, most interviewees will not agree, making transcription more difficult. With regards to the quality of the data collected, researchers have found that answers to their initial questions are superficial, requiring additional (sometimes difficult) probing to elicit more detailed and useful responses. With regards to funding, Supang complained that TICA regulations require that her staff travel to site visits via car or train - but not air, and cap per diem rates to a maximum of 240 baht per person per day (just under USD 7.0).

18. (U) Kudos: Supang noted that Ministry of Labor officials have been extremely helpful to her research efforts, responding to requests for meetings and providing candid responses to questions asked.

19. (SBU) Recommendations: Supang suggested Post work with TICA to seek flexibility with regard to per diem and travel regulations. (Note: we intend to raise with TICA the adequacy of current travel and per diem regulations. We do not however believe it appropriate to seek an exception for only those organizations funded by the USG. End Note.)

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